

Today, Southwestern Bell is one of the largest and most successful companies in the country ... But, in 1878,

Alexander Graham Bell was arrested for peddling telephones on the street corner.

In 1876 Alexander Graham Bell was working on a device to aid the hearing impaired when he accidentally transmitted his voice over wires. He called it the "telephone". Realizing the great value of his discovery, Bell was trying to demonstrate how his invention worked when he was whisked off to jail for trying to solicit funds from ignorant people". A newspaper article the following day read, "sane people know it is impossible to transmit voice over wires and were it possible, it would be of no value to the citizens of this country".

But the telephones were seen to be valuable by a few people in Hutchinson. In 1880, C.C. Hutchinson has the first lines installed connecting his office with the waterworks and the Hutchinson News. Druggist and Banker E.I., Meyer had two more lines installed connecting his drugstore and home.

The first telephone franchise was granted to the Hutchinson Water, Light and Telephone Company in 1887. The company was successful in recruiting new customers and were quite innovative in that they laid the first underground cable in the state of Kansas. Their telephones, however, infringed on the patent owned by the Bell company, which forced them to sell their business. In 1889, the Missouri & Kansas Telephone Company acquired the franchise for a purchase price \$4,800 (which represented the court judgment) and \$1,825.95 cash. One of the first decisions the company made was to con-

struct lines between Hutchinson and Wichita.

In the early days of telephone service, competition was fierce and new equipment was being developed constantly. In 1889, the telephone office was moved to the same building where the Hutchinson Daily News was published, and there the company installed a new magneto switchboard. In 1901 the Bellamy & Burns Telephone Company (which became Burns and Burns in 1905) was granted a telephone franchise in Hutchinson. They introduced one of the first battery exchange systems in Kansas with poles constructed on both sides of alleys with the wires attached to porcelain knobs. In 1908, the Missouri & Kansas Company built a new building located on Sherman Street equipped with a Western Electric No. 8 battery switchboard which provided higher quality service and increased their subscribers to 1,131.

By 1910, the Missouri & Kansas Telephone Co. purchased Burns & Burns. The next year the company erected a building that still stands on the corner of Second & Walnut, for the sum of \$107,500. They also installed new



underground cables in order to better consolidate their new and larger service which now included 3,947 phones. By the end of their construction they had installed 1,886 city poles, 152,000 feet of aerial cable, 131 miles of city wire, 51 manholes, and 26,300 feet of underground cable.

In 1917 the company changed its name to Southwestern Bell. By 1920 the operation had grown to need 41 switchboard and toll call operators. All of these positions were based at the Second & Walnut location which continued to house the main office. After the flood of 1929, Southwestern Bell agains expanded its operations and its facilities to better serve their growing customer base.

We have come a long way from the day when Alexander Graham Bell was arrested for selling telephones. Today, there are few people who live without them, and telephone service remains a highly competitive business where new technology is being developed every day. Southwestern Bell now provides more than 24,000 lines to Hutchinson customers through its state of the art digital switch system installed in 1994. The digital switch system is expected to serve our telecommunications needs well into the next century. For more than 110 years Southwestern Bell has served Hutchinson and its residents through good times and bad, and their company continues to play an important role in the history and development of our community.